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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

December 7, 2022

Mr. Shou Zi Chew
Chief Executive Officer
TikTok
5800 Bristol Parkway, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230

Dear Mr. Chew:

We write to request that you, other TikTok officers, and appropriate employees provide a briefing to respond to reports that your company is serving as a platform for the sexual exploitation and predation of children, and to outline what measures you are taking to quash it.

Investigative reporting by *Forbes* has revealed that TikTok has been incapable of rooting out the spate of TikTok accounts that are trading illegal child sexual content.¹ According to *Forbes*, TikTok has frequently stalled removing sexually explicit images of children, concluding that “no violation” occurred.² According to the reporting, only after TikTok was reshown the content initially labeled as “no violation,” “the company confirmed the content was violative and removed it immediately.”³ Furthermore, the ease with which TikTok allows multiple users to login to a single TikTok account to “post-in-private” content, has reportedly infested your platform with an abundance of sexually explicit images of minors, hidden from detection.⁴ This is allegedly happening despite TikTok having the resources to detect unusual and multiple logins and available technology to require users login using a two-step verification process.⁵

¹ Alexandra S. Levine, *These TikTok Accounts Are Hiding Child Sexual Abuse Material in Plain Sight*, FORBES, November 14, 2022.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

Equally troubling are the livestreams your company hosts that allow adult TikTok users to monetarily persuade children to perform sexually suggestive acts.⁶ Despite public reporting flagging your company's failures to safeguard children, TikTok apparently fails to verify ages of livestream hosts, thereby allowing minors to bypass your purported livestream age restriction policies.⁷ Adult TikTok users apparently purchase virtual gifts from TikTok, and then use such gifts to bargain and entice children to stream explicit content.⁸ According to one data analytics firm, TikTok users spent more than \$2 billion in 2021, a significant increase from the \$1.3 billion users spent in 2020.⁹ *Forbes* reported you declined to comment when asked what percentage of user revenue was generated by user purchases on TikTok Live.¹⁰ Moreover, the content that children stream on TikTok are often unwittingly recorded or screenshot, thereby making these explicit images permanently digital.¹¹ According to recent reporting, TikTok has now suddenly decided to "increase the minimum age requirement for livestreaming from 16 to 18 beginning on [November] 23 [2022]."¹²

A former TikTok moderator, who was reportedly contracted with your company for six months, was publicly distressed: "We would see death and graphic, graphic pornography. I would see nude underage children *every day*."¹³ She also publicly stated, "[u]nderage nude children was the plethora of what I saw [at TikTok]."¹⁴ Reportedly, sexually explicit illegal images of minors are widely circulated through private accounts and livestreams hosted via TikTok.¹⁵ Considering that about half of all U.S. children use TikTok every day, our concerns enumerated above are paramount.¹⁶ We expect you are equally alarmed by these reports.

Therefore, we ask you provide the Committee with a briefing as soon as possible, but no later than December 21, 2022. Please be prepared to brief the Committee on the following, but not limited to these, questions:

⁶ Alexandra S. Levine, *How TikTok Live Became 'A Strip Club Filled With 15-Year-Olds'*, FORBES, April 27, 2022 ("The transactions are happening in a public online forum open to viewers almost anywhere on the planet. Some of the demands are explicit — like asking girls to kiss each other, spread their legs or flash the camera — and some harder to detect, masked with euphemisms. . . . In return, the girls are showered with virtual gifts, like flowers, hearts, ice cream cones and lollipops, that can be converted to cash.").

⁷ *Id.* ("[A] 17-year-old from South Carolina, told *Forbes* that some of her underage friends had been earning \$200 a week off the gifts they'd racked up in their TikTok livestreams. Although she can't receive Live gifts yet because she signed up using her correct age . . .").

⁸ *Id.* ("IF U DO THE BLACK PART IM GONNA SEND TIKTOK LIVE 35.000 TIKTOK COINS (400\$)," one viewer wrote, urging her to cut off her bra.").

⁹ *TikTok Saw 2.3 Billion in Consumer Spending in 2021, Up 77 Percent Y/Y*, SENSORTOWER, (January 2022).

¹⁰ Alexandra S. Levine, *How TikTok Live Became 'A Strip Club Filled With 15-Year-Olds'*, FORBES, April 27, 2022.

¹¹ *Id.* ("And these exchanges often generate material that may never go away, as screenshots and recordings spread off mainstream platforms across the internet.").

¹² C. Mandler, *TikTok to raise age requirement for hosting livestreams and add adult-only streams*, CBS, Oct. 19, 2022.

¹³ Bobby Allyn, *Former TikTok moderators sue over emotional toll of 'extremely disturbing' videos*, NPR, March 24, 2022 (emphasis added).

¹⁴ *Id.*


¹⁵ Alexandra S. Levine, *These TikTok Accounts Are Hiding Child Sexual Abuse Material in Plain Sight*, FORBES, November 14, 2022; Alexandra S. Levine, *How TikTok Live Became 'A Strip Club Filled With 15-Year-Olds'*, FORBES, April 27, 2022.

¹⁶ *Online Grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization*, THORN, PowerPoint Chart, p. 26, https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/2022_Online_Grooming_Report.pdf.

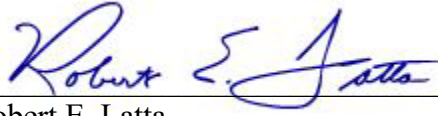
1. How much revenue does TikTok generate via livestreams?
 - a. Has TikTok determined, either internally or by external source(s), if any revenue was generated by minors hosting livestreams?
 - i. When did you make this determination?
 - ii. How much revenue did TikTok generate via livestream of minors?
2. What mechanisms, if any, are used to detect if minors are livestreaming? Please detail the following parameters:
 - a. Whether content is being reviewed by actual persons.
 - b. Whether such content review is conducted by TikTok internally or by a subcontractor.
 - c. Where such content review is occurring, such as in the United States versus a foreign site.
3. Why did materials on TikTok flagged by users and *Forbes* as sexually explicit receive a “no violation” determination?
 - a. Why were materials afterwards removed after receiving a “no violation” determination?
4. What internal company discussions took place to raise the age of livestreaming on TikTok to 18?
 - a. Were the factors that resulted in TikTok raising the livestreaming age to 18, known to the company prior to October 2022? Were those factors known to TikTok prior to January 2022?
 - b. What is your method of age verification to ensure this is followed?
5. Did any board members of TikTok or ByteDance express concern about sexually explicit content of minors on your platform? If so, who and when?
6. Following reporting that multiple users have abused single factor sign in to share sexually explicit images, why has TikTok not required multi-factor authentication (MFA) to sign into an account?
 - a. Does TikTok plan to require MFA in the future? If not, why?

To ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact the Committee on Energy and Commerce staff at 202-225-3641.

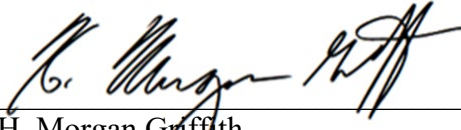
Sincerely,



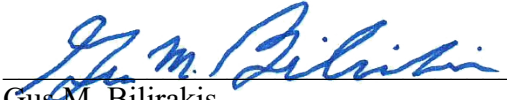
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Republican Leader
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Robert E. Latta
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